Nick Gulas

Southern Wrestling Promoter

Bill Coleman

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By Bill Coleman

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I’m a Fan

From 1966 until 1974, my father and I had front row center standing reserved seats at Boutwell Auditorium in Birmingham. It wasn’t until I enlisted in the Army that I gave up my seat. I’ve been a fan of Tennessee Wrestling, “Gulas-style,” since that time. I’ve seen a lot of wrestling since 1974, but none comes even close to what I saw when I was a kid.

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Nick Gulas – Southern Wrestling Promoter

Nick Gulas operated what was once the largest wrestling promotion in the South. Gulas did not have the best reputation within the industry, but there is no denying that he was one of the most successful wrestling promoters in the entire United States during the territorial days. From the 1940′s until the late 1970′s fans returned week after week to his wrestling cards. *“Ladies and gentlemen we’re expecting an all-time record breaking crowd, better get your tickets early. They’re available at the Municipal Auditorium Box Office.”*

The Road to Nashville

Nick Gulas, of Greek descent, was born into an entrepreneurial family. Family members owned Gulas Supper Club, a well-known Birmingham restaurant. His brother Gus, even into the late 1980's, owned and operated fast food operations. Nick was drawn to the entertainment business. He began working for Birmingham wrestling promoter Joe Gunther in the 1930′s, running errands and doing chores for management and the wrestlers.

In a 1984 interview, Gulas told a reporter that he arrived in Nashville "about 1937″ and found the Hippodrome. He soon began booking wrestling on Tuesday nights. In the 1940′s, he booked big name dance bands in the Hippodrome like Benny Goodman, Xavier Cugat, Harry James and Sonny Dunham.

The exact year is unknown but sometime in the mid-1940's, Nick Gulas began co-promoting wrestling cards with veteran wrestler Roy Welch, a member of the famous Welch wrestling family. A newspaper article from 1953 stated that Roy Welch had added Birmingham to his company when he bought a one-half interest in the promotion from Joe Gunther in January of that year. Gulas was not mentioned in the article but this was the point where Nick Gulas was eventually able to return to his hometown as a wrestling promoter.

On most Monday nights Gulas made the trip from the home office in Nashville to Birmingham to personally oversee the cards, sometimes even walking to ringside from the back office to involve himself in outcome of the main event. It was also Nick who was on the other end of the phone at Live Studio Wrestling when the card needed to be changed as a result of some event that night.

In the early days of the partnership Roy Welch was the primary decision maker and Nick was more often the public face. Welch was the son of a wrestler and had three brothers in the business, all of them main-event caliber. Roy had been wrestling since the 1930's and had even owned and toured with one of the first "wrestling bears." Though it has been said that they didn't like each other, Nick had to have respected Roy for his

knowledge and experience. Roy (born in 1902) was also a little older than Nick (born in 1914).

In the early years of their partnership, Roy worked as a wrestler on the cards and it was not mentioned in promotional material that he actually owned part of the company. Nick was promoted as the “matchmaker” but behind the scenes Nick was the senior partner. This arrangement also allowed Roy to be the “good guy” with the talent since the more vocally feisty Gulas was probably more than willing to defend the partnership’s position “face to face.”

The duo eventually formed Gulas/Welch Enterprises, Inc. The promotion was a member of the National Wrestling Alliance, a federation of wrestling promoters that exchanged talent and supported a unified Heavyweight Wrestling Champion. Each promotion could, however, promote its own champions in any other category. For instance, Nick and Roy could, and did, have their own World Tag Team Champions-- in this case the “world” was Nick and Roy’s promotion. Not very many fans pondered how their city could be so fortunate as to have the World Tag Team Champions wrestling week after week; those few that did really didn’t care.

Gulas’ best drawing cities hosted wrestling every week, only taking a week off when a traveling event like the circus or an ice show had an arena booked. Even then, often the card would be moved to an alternate venue. Rickwood Field in Birmingham served that purpose when Municipal (Boutwell) Auditorium was unavailable. It is actually pretty amazing that wrestling could sell 4000 – 6000 seats in Birmingham, fifty or more weeks out of the year. Wrestling didn’t stop for holidays. Christmas and Thanksgiving cards were promoted as something special.

Some of Gulas’ best cities were Nashville TN, Memphis TN, Chattanooga TN, Birmingham AL, and Louisville KY. Others that made him money over the years were Jonesboro AR, Lexington KY, Wheeling, WV, Huntsville, AL, Jackson TN, Tupelo, MS and Dayton OH. Over the years he ran spot shows at probably every town within a few hundred miles of Nashville. Small towns like Attala, Hartselle, Jasper, Sulligent, Decatur and Hamilton in Alabama, and Crossville, Cookville, Shelbyville, Tullahoma, Dixon, Waverly, Henderson and Lawrenceburg in Tennessee saw wrestling stars

appear in their high school gyms and town halls. These were big events for small towns, and because the overhead was low, they were very profitable.

Gulas/Welch Enterprises covered an area hundreds of miles from one end to the other. The wrestlers did almost all of their traveling by automobile. Among the wrestlers, the most serious injuries did not occur in the ring, but on the road. History has forgotten most of the car accidents, but some were horrific. In 1976, Frank Hester, Pepe Lopez and their manager, Sam Bass, lost their lives traveling from Memphis to Nashville. In 1974, Len Rossi, one of Nick Gulas' major talents, was critically injured in an auto accident near Jackson Tennessee. The accident forced Rossi into retirement.

Tommy Gilbert, Nick Gulas and Eddie Marlin Jerry Jarrett in an interview with Tim Dills at Kayfabe Memories had this to say about the traveling: "During those days, I would make Memphis TV on Saturday morning, jump in the car without changing from my wrestling clothes and drive to either Huntsville or Chattanooga television, then make the Chattanooga house show and then drive to Birmingham television. It was crazy, but we were young and hungry."

Not An Easy Man To Get Along With

By most accounts, Nick was not a popular man in the industry. He was loud and somewhat obnoxious, but maybe that was one of the secrets to his long success. Wrestlers have to be self- promoters and self-serving to make a living, and promoters had to look out for their business. It was a clash of interests that always kept the promoters and wrestlers trying to get the better of one another. The stories about Nick's poor payoffs have become legend. But no doubt they are true. Early in his career, Jack Brisco received $12.50 from Gulas. Even up into the late 1970′s jobbers (enhancement talent who were paid to put bigger names over) were making around $25 a match. Most jobbers had to have day jobs to live. In Birmingham, Bob Holland was Nick's main referee. His pay was $15 to referee the entire card.

Birmingham Co-Promoter Joe Denaburg, Roy Welch and Nick Gulas

There were some wrestlers who Nick paid well and treated well. Len Rossi, Tojo Yamamoto and Jackie Fargo were unquestionably Nick's best draws from the early 1960′s to the early 1970′s. All three of them could have been stars anywhere in the country, but all three chose to work for Nick Gulas for the majority of their careers. Rossi's career was cut short by his auto accident, but even after the wreck Nick kept him employed in various capacities. Tojo and Fargo were friends with Jerry Jarrett, but chose to remain with Gulas when Jarrett began promoting competing cards.

Nick has a reputation for paying poorly, yet big names chose to work for him. Just a few of the major stars who worked for Nick over the years were Tex Riley, Mike Clancy, Larry Chene, Sputnik Monroe, Tor Yamato, Crazy Luke Graham, The Von Brauners, Danny Hodge, the Sheik, Frankie Caine, Al Costello, Don Kent, Yvon Robert, Dick the Bruiser, Eddie Graham, Mario Milano, Pepper Gomez and Sam Steamboat. Many stars didn't just cruise through the territory; they would often work extended programs and return numerous times to the promotion.

Quite a few good wrestlers (or performers) chose to work for Nick and became mainstays of the promotion-- Don Carson, Ken Lucas, Corsica Joe, Tamayo Soto, Dennis Hall, Don and Al Greene, Johnny Long, Johnny Walker (later to become Mr. Wrestling #II), and Saul Weingeroff are just a few.

So it seems poor payoffs didn't hurt Nick's ability to book good names.

Buddy Wayne, who worked for Gulas for many years, had this to say: "Nick was a very good promoter. His payoffs were right. I wrestled for him many years and promoted towns for him. Almost every wrestler thinks their payoff should have been more. Nick had a bad habit of saying the houses were more than they were; and then when he made the pay-offs, he paid what was there. One night in Chattanooga he said, "Damn boy, we did $10,000.00 tonight. I said "Nick, it was a little over $8000.00″ Nick said that was close to $10000.00 and that is what he said it was in the dressing room. When he paid off; he paid on $8000.00 which was what it was. Most everyone thought they should have got more, but it was not $10,000.00."

But then there are those who worked for Nick for years who claim Gulas was not only a miserly promoter-- he would take what wasn't rightfully his if he thought that he could get away with it. Don Greene has told the story of the time that he and Al Greene were booked against Larry Chene and Mike Clancy. All four of them were promised the same payoff, yet when comparing notes after the match they found out they had all received different pay. According to Greene, an informal investigation of the books reflected that they had received the same pay, but evidently took the difference for himself. Chene and Clancy got so mad they left the territory.

TV Sold the Product

In the 1950′s, Nick Gulas introduced his wrestling stars to the television audience, which had grown to include almost every home. Though Gulas continued to use print media, it was television that drove the fans into the arenas. He used a formula that was repeated over and over to great effect. As soon as one grudge was settled (meaning when the promoters had used every conceivable gimmick, and the program was on the verge of become stale), a new one was set up on TV.

For example, Birmingham’s Saturday night TV matches, set the stage for the following Monday night’s grudge match at Municipal Auditorium. This tactic was employed in every city that Gulas promoted that had local TV programming. Each city had its own wrestling universe and the events of another city didn’t figure into the booking. Match results from other cities were never acknowledged-- even title changes.

Wrestling announcers became local celebrities. The three that had the longest runs for Gulas were Sterling Brewer in Birmingham, Harry Thornton in Chattanooga, and Lance Brown in Memphis.

Gulas Leaves the Business

The wrestling business began to pass by Nick Gulas in the mid to late 1970′s. WTBS out of Atlanta began airing wrestling to a national audience and fans began to fall away from their local promotions, which seemed minor league when compared to the production that Ted Turner’s money could buy.

Christine Jarrett had been a key employee of Gulas/Welch Enterprises since she began selling tickets for the promotion in 1948. Her son, Jerry Jarrett, sat in the ticket booth with her from about age 7. He worked his way up from program and ticket seller to regional star for Gulas.

Details differ depending on who is telling the story, but over time Jarrett had taken responsibility for much of the work that the ailing Roy Welch once handled (Welch died in 1977). Jarrett eventually became part owner of the business. Jarrett booked the Western side of the territory. Gulas booked the Eastern side.

There was an acrimonious split between Jarrett and Gulas, partly according to Jarrett and others who were involved in the business at the time because Jarrett refused to book Nick’s son George at the top of the cards on his Western side. Nick was old school and he wasn’t able to keep up with the younger Jarrett, who was headstrong about changing to suit the times.

Nick’s Eastern side of the territory was sinking while Jarrett’s Western side was prospering and Jarrett refused to tamper with a winning formula by booking George in his main events.

The split was at Nick’s expense. Jarrett took most of Nick’s top talent and won the battles when they competed for the same fans-- Memphis, for one, which must have been a huge blow to Nick’s ego since it had been his city for several decades. Gulas lost Memphis TV Channel 13 to Jarrett, along with Memphis’ biggest star Jerry Lawler and popular announcers Lance Russell and Dave Brown.

Nick Gulas’ last card in Memphis on Monday, March 21, 1977, drew a reported 484. Jarrett’s card the night before, Sunday, drew a reported 4,887.

By the summer of 1980, Nick was out of the business. He died on January 21, 1991.

Len Rossi

Len Rossi was one of the top three talents, along with Tojo Yamamoto and Jackie Fargo, from the early 1960′s until 1972. He was extremely over the fans in Birmingham-- even more popular than Jackie Fargo who worked Memphis most Mondays, the same night as Birmingham wrestling. Rossi held numerous tag titles with many different partners, and he was the Southern Jr. Heavyweight Champion for much of the 1960s.

Rossi began working for Nick Gulas in 1958. Don Kalt (Fargo) recommended Rossi when Nick Gulas remarked that he needed a babyface. Kalt gave Rossi a pink suit that Buddy Rogers had given him and came up with an angle-- Rossi did a run-in during a Fargo Brothers interview in the pink suit and drop kicked both Fargos several times before they fled to the dressing room. Rossi was immediately over with the fans. He had planned on staying in Tennessee only two weeks.

LEN ROSSI

Len Rossi’s original signature finisher was the Boston crab. When he came back from a short tour of Japan he came back with a beard and a second finisher-- the sleeper. The sleeper always got a loud reaction from the fans.

Len wasn’t above using a foreign object to win a grudge match. Sometimes it was a Tojo’s wooden shoe or some other object he snatched from his opponent, but more often it was a steel folding chair he grabbed from ringside.

An automobile accident ended Rossi’s wrestling career in 1972 at the height of his popularity with the fans.

Len Rossi and Tex Riley

Tex Riley was the veteran and Rossi was the up and comer. Their matches with Corsica Joe and Jean, Don and Al Greene and the Fargos sold out arenas all over the Gulas/Welch territory.

Tex Riley died soon after a wrestling match in 1964 at the age of 50.

Tex Riley and Len Rossi

Len Rossi and Bearcat Brown

Under his real name, Matt Jewell, Bearcat Brown worked “colored” matches for Nick Gulas in the mid-60′s. Later as Bearcat, he was one of Gulas’ most popular wrestlers. No tag teams were more popular than Bearcat Brown and Len Rossi. They won their Word Tag Title in 1969 and packed the arenas with both black and white fans. After Len Rossi’s career-ending accident, his son Joey formed a team with Bearcat.

Geroge Gulas, center, interviews Len Rossi and Bearcat Brown during a television wrestling program.

Matt Jewell

Before he was the wildly popular Bearcat Brown, he was Matt Jewel, who wrestled against other black guys in “colored matches.” He was usually a heel for Nick Gulas, often working against babyface Prince Pullins.

Jackie Fargo

Many wrestlers have claimed to be Memphis' top draw – good arguments can be made for both Sputnik Monroe and Jerry Lawler. But there is truly just one king – Jackie Fargo (real name Henry Faggart.) For many Memphis wrestling fans, Jackie Fargo was wrestling. During Jackie's time on top, very few wrestlers could actually fill an arena on the merits of their drawing power alone. He was one of the few.

Jackie and Don Fargo

In 1955, Jackie and Don Kalt were both working in New York for promoter Toots Mondt. They both had died platinum blond hair and were very flamboyant for the times – more in the Buddy Rogers mold than Gorgeous George. (In fact, Kalt was somewhat of a protégé of Rogers). Kalt first went

into New York as Don Stevens, a worked brother to Ray Stevens. Jackie was wrestling as Honeyboy Fargo. Mondt thought they would mesh well as a team, and he was proven right. Mondt gave them championship belts, and they were soon selling out Madison Square Garden against major stars like Antonino Rocca.Jackie Fargo and Don Stevens against Rocca and Miguel Perez sold out the Garden, drawing 20,000+ fans.

Jackie and Sonny Fargo

Their next stop was Tennessee, working for promoter Nick Gulas as the Fargo Brothers, Jackie and Don. The Fargo Brothers became wrestling legends, often the first names mentioned when a fan from the Tennessee – Alabama region reminisces about that era.

In 1957, Jackie and Don Fargo (Don Kalt) arrived in Tennessee and quickly took the belts from Corsica Joe and Corsica Jean. Tennessee had never seen a tag team like the Fargo Brothers. Many colorful wrestlers had passed through before, but none paid attention to detail like the Fargos. On some nights, in a three fall match, they'd change trunks after every fall. Their wardrobe included capes, canes, top hats, and leopard skin. The Fargos would strut to the ring, stalling occasionally to sneer and draw more heat. For the rest of the 1950s through the early part of the 1960s Jackie and Don were at the top of the cards throughout Tennessee and as far south as Birmingham, Alabama.

Sonny, a third Fargo, showed up in Tennessee not long after Don and Jackie began working for Gulas. Sonny (Jack Faggart) was the legit brother of Jackie. Sonny often worked as a manager/second for Jackie and Don. At one point, Sonny had to step in for Don when Don actually shot himself practicing quick draw.

Roy Welch, Nick Gulas and Jackie Fargo

Don never liked working for Nick Gulas and eventually took off for greener pastures. He spent the next several years working in various promotions under several different names and gimmicks. Not long after Don left, Jackie turned babyface. His turn was drawn out over several weeks and played out in several cities in the Gulas territory. Since Len Rossi was the most popular babyface working for Gulas at the time it was programmed for Jackie to "save" Len. (This was a payback because Gulas used the Fargos to get Len Rossi over with the fans when he first arrived in Tennessee).

Jackie stayed in Memphis and continued to be the top draw. He wrestling both singles and as a part of a team with dozens of tag partners, including his brother Sonny, who was the main cog in a crowd pleasing gimmick — Sonny became "Roughhouse" Fargo, who was released from a mental hospital occasionally to help Jackie settle scores.

Jackie Fargo's signature finishing maneuver was the atomic drop, but it was the Fargo strut that made the fans go crazy – especially when he "went into it" after being thrown into the ropes. Many wrestlers have used the strut as a part of their act, but nobody did it like Jackie.

Later in the 1960s, Don returned to Tennessee with a different look, but the same drawing ability. He liked working with Jackie, but didn't like working for Nick Gulas any better this time. He left again for new territories and resumed his habit of changing his name to suit his current gimmick.

In 1963, Louis Tillet as Joe(y) was brought into Tennessee for a while to work as one of Jackie's Brothers, often in six-man tag matches with Jackie and Sonny.

In the mid-1960s, while Jackie was the top draw for Nick Gulas, in Tennessee, promoter Jack Pfefer (working with Tony Santos) brought him into Boston as champion. That championship meant nothing beyond that small promotion. It is worth noting that Pfefer, eccentric as he was, knew that Jackie could draw; Jackie was one of the few names that Pfefer allowed to come in under his own name. Most of the rest were rip-offs of major stars (Bummy Rogers, Hobo Brazil.

Tojo Yamamoto

In real life, he was Harold Watanabe, a native Hawaiian. In the ring, he was Tojo Yamamoto, tough Japanese wrestler and one of the South's best wrestling draws from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s.

Little is known about Tojo Yamamoto's early days. He was born about 1927 in Hawaii.

Tojo worked in Florida in 1961-1962. On November 16, he and Taro Myaki defeated Eddie Graham & Dick Steinborn for the Florida NWA U.S. Tag Team Championship.

He began working for promoter Gulas/Welch Enterprises in the early 1960s. It didn't take Tojo long before he became Gulas' number one heel. He remained in that spot until the Nick Gulas left the business in 1980.

Tojo often worked tag team matches, and he was always the lead heel. In the 1960s, he won titles with Alex Perez and Johnny Long; however, as a heel, he most often teamed with fellow Asians, or "Orientals" as they were called then. He had good runs with Tamayo Soto (not really Asian), Professor Ito, Great Higami, Sugi Sito, Tor Kamata, and Mitsu Hirai.

Tojo had a pre-match act that was quite effective. He would walk to the ring in ceremonial robe and wooden shoes, ignoring the fans who were booing him. He would enter the ring and walk to his corner, then reach into his trunks and bring out a pack of salt. Like a sumo wrestler, he would stomp his feet a few times and toss the salt. Often he would have another pack of salt – to throw it in the eyes of an opponent. Those wooden shoes made

good weapons also. Many wrestlers were hit over the head with those shoes – and many took them away from Tojo and bashed them against Tojo's head.

Of course, since this is wrestling, being the most hated wrestler in the promotion meant that it was only natural for him to turn babyface a few times. He actually made a very good babyface, teaming with those who he had not long before hated so badly – Len Rossi, Jackie Fargo, and Jerry Jarrett, among others.

Tojo did make two forays into other territories during the time that he was primarily working for Nick Gulas. He toured the Carolinas twice as P.Y. Chung and Texas once as T.Y. Chung. Each time that he returned to Gulas/Welch Enterprises he quickly regained his status as number one heel.

Tojo was one of his most valued employees out of the ring, as well as in. Gulas used Tojo as a trainer. Many who went on to be big names were trained by Tojo; Jerry Jarrett, Bobby Eaton, and George Gulas were three of

the higher profile names. (Some would say that George didn't go on to better things, but that's another story).

Tojo had a mean streak. He could be sadistic, especially when booked against guys trying to break into the business. In fact, that was one of his jobs. If somebody could get through a match with Tojo and still want to be a wrestler, he might have potential.

Jerry Lawler says in his book *It's Good to Be the King… Sometimes* that his first match was against Tojo. Lawler wrote, "He chopped me on the side, then threw me on the rope and chopped me on the head coming off the rope. Chop, chop, chop. All I did was sell his chops, which was very easy to do, because he hit me real hard. He didn't pull them at all. My chest was red and I had hand prints all over me. He also had this move called "The Claw" that he applied. It was horrible. For fifteen minutes he just beat me up…. After my match with Tojo, I came out of the ring and Jackie (Fargo) said, "Well kid, still wanna be a wrestler?" I told Jackie it was great. I knew I couldn't act hurt or complain because this was my initiation. So I didn't ever moan. For my pains, they booked me six straight weeks against Tojo Yamamoto. I got the same treatment every week."

Tojo also participated in the backstage beating of Jack Donovan. Jerry Jarrett and Jackie Fargo were also involved in the backstage beat-down, but it was Tojo's wooden shoe that did the most damage to Donovan. Accounts vary depending on who is telling the story but it is known fact that a disagreement regarding the predetermined finish of a match between Donovan, who had just turned babyface, and Tojo led to the beating.

When Jerry Jarrett broke away from Nick Gulas, and began competing for the same cities. Tojo, even though he was friends with Jarrett, decided to stay with Gulas. It didn't take Jarrett long to win the promotional battle, and Tojo began working for Jarrett in the summer of 1980. Tojo took on the role of aging veteran who could still keep up with the younger talents. He did some managing during this time also.

In 1978, Tojo had formed a heel tag team with fellow veteran Gypsy Joe called the "No Pain Train." They were Mid-American Tag Champions that same year. In 1982, they got back together and won the World Tag Team Title in Angelo Poffo's Kentucky based IWF.

In World Class during the late 1980′s, Tojo became Phil Hickerson’s manager. Hickerson became known as P.Y. Chu-Hi. Hickerson and Tojo were involved in memorable feuds with Eric Embry and Chris Adams.

Tojo returned to Texas (now USWA) in 1991 to manage Embry. This was to be Tojo’s last big run.

Depression and health isues drove Tojo to commit suicide on February 19, 1992.

Corsica Joe and Corsica Jean

In 1948, Corsica Joe began wrestling in Canada under his under his real name, Francois Miquet. He held the Canadian Jr. Championship for two years.

Corsica Jean and Joe

He formed a tag team with Jean Louis Roy in Florida, The Corsican Brothers-– Joe and Jean. The team had its greatest success while working for Nick Gulas. They were billed as World Tag Champions upon arrival in the territory on February 2, 1957, and they swapped the belts back and forth with the Fargos for most of the rest of that year.

After Jean returned from the business (in 1992, Jean was murdered in the Tampa, Florida, bar that he owned), Corsica Joe became a Gulas-Welch

mainstay for the rest of his career. He formed a main event level team with Chin Lee in the mid-1960s.

Joe settled into working prelims and mid-card for Nick Gulas and finally retired in 1972.

Corsica Joe was married to wrestler Sarah Lee for 43 years. They sometimes worked mixed tag matches together. She sometimes used the names Sarah Corsica and Mrs. Corsica Joe. Sarah Lee died in 2008. Joe died in March 2010 at age 90.

Saul Weingeroff

Of the many wrestling managers that worked for Nick Gulas, Saul (Solomon) Weingeroff was the most well-known. He knew how to get the crowd worked up, and he had usually accomplished that before he got to the ring. His career as a manager spanned over thirty years, and he managed dozens of wrestlers, almost all of them tag teams. If a promoter wanted to get a heel tag team over the the fans, and Weingeroff was available, he was the man to call.

Saul Weingeroff with Suji Sito and Tojo Yamamoto

Weingeroff was often introduced as hailing from the nearest upscale neighborhood. In Birningham that was Mountain Brook, one of the most exclusive communities in the United States. On his way to the ring he

would argue with the fans and once the match began he would spend much of the match arguing with ringside fans.

Gentleman Saul Weingeroff is most remembered for managing the Von Brauners, Kurt and Karl. The Von Brauners did a Nazi gimmick that would have been impossible to do today. In a time not that far removed from Hitler's atrocities, it was permitted everywhere in the country. What made it bizarre for even those times was the fact that Saul Weingeroff was a Jew with an obviously Jewish name.

Weingeroff and the Von Brauners worked all over the United States. Florida and Tennessee were two territories where they spent a lot of time, all of it at the top of the cards. After the Von Brauners split with Saul, he settled in Nashville and worked primarily for Nick Gulas and Roy Welch.

A partial list of teams that Saul managed were The Spoilers (Lorenzo Parente and Joey Corea), Mephisto and Dante (Frankie Cain and Bobby Hart), Lorenzo Parente and Bobby Hart, Tojo Yamamoto and Sugi Sito, Tojo and Professor Ito, Tojo and Johnny Long, Sputnik and Rocket Monroe, The Islanders, and Randy and Angelo Poffo.

Late in his wrestling career, Weingeroff worked behind the scenes for Nick Gulas.

Saul worked as a Sheriff's Deputy near Nashville after leaving the wrestling business. He died in 1984 the age of 74.

Don and Al Greene

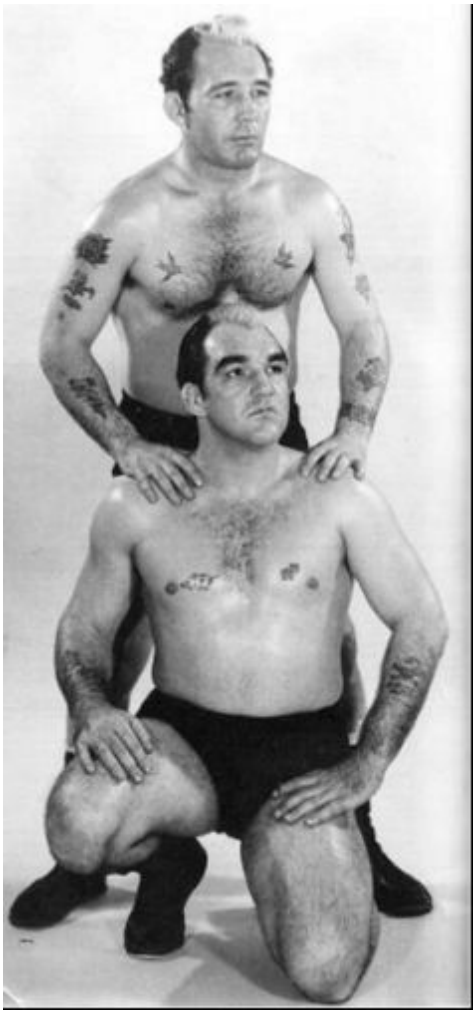
In the 1950s, Don Greene (legit name) and Al Greene (Al Denny) began teaming together in Tennessee for the Nick Gulas and Roy Welch promotion. Billed as “the Heavenly Bodies,” they were one of the best heel teams in the territory.

They rarely left the Tennessee area as a team, but did work for a short time on the Gulf Coast for Jack Pfefer as the Zangaroos. After tossing the Zangaroos name, Pfefer had them dye their hair green.

Al (on the left) and Don Greene

Sir Clements began managing the team in the early 1970s. Don and Al teamed off and on into the mid-1970s. They held both the Southern and World Tag Titles and Don held the Southern Jr. Heavyweight Championship three times.

Sputnik Monroe

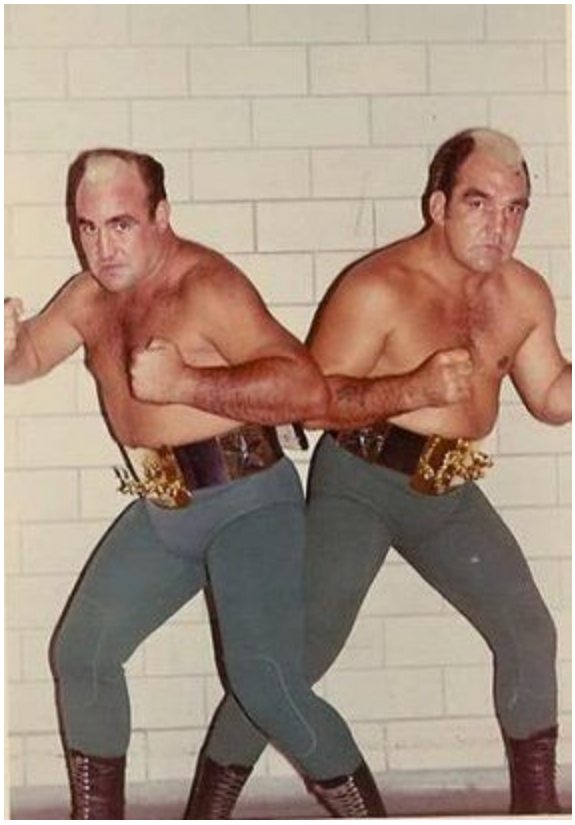


Sputnik (kneeling) with first Rocket Monroe (Bill Fletcher)

Sputnik Monroe worked carnivals taking all comers in the 1940′s. In his early days as a pro wrestler he was a decent babyface. He found his niche when he turned heel and became a brawler. Sputnik Monroe was one of the best heels in the history of the business. Even his name was controversial – Russia was in league with Devil as far as most of America was concerned – and the satellite “Sputnik” was its greatest achievement.

Sputnik eventually recruited “brothers’ Rocket (two different) and Jet (his real brother, Gary Brumbaugh). He worked with the other Monroes most often in Florida, Georgia and Gulf Coast.

Sputnik was the biggest star in Memphis during the early 1960′s and was over huge with black fans. He wrestled all over the country and was main-event everywhere.



Sputnik (right) with the second Rocket Monroe (Maury High)

Jimmy and Billy Hines

The Hines Brothers were Billy and Jimmy, who sometimes were billed as Billy “Boy” and Jimmy “Bad Boy” Hines.

Jimmy and Billy Hines

They were Southern mainstays in the 1960s and early 1970s, working main events and holding titles in Gulf Coast Wrestling and for Gulas and Welch. They also worked in the Carolinas as the Masked Red Demons.

The Scufflin’ Hillbillies

The Scufflin’ Hillbillies (Rip Collins and Chuck Conley) first worked as a team in the early 1960′s for promoter Al Haft out of Columbus, Ohio. They were a gimmick team, but worked main events. They had a major feud for Al Haft with Johnny Barend and Magificent Maurice. Soon after leaving the Columbus promotion, they feuded with the Kangaroos at Madison Square Garden, scoring at least one win.

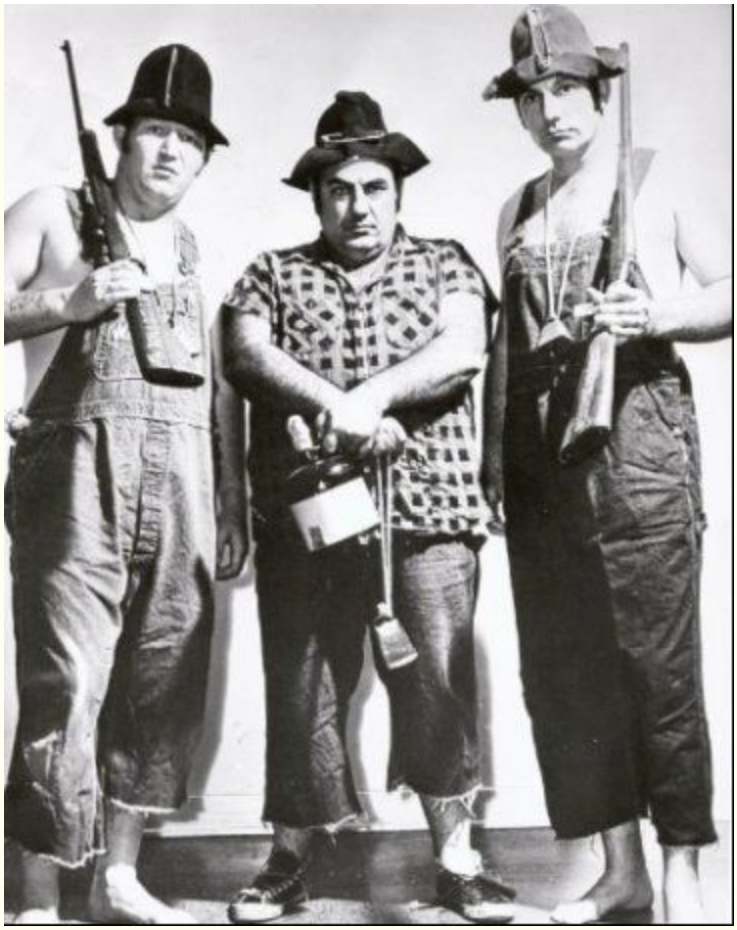
Rip and Chuck

A second team was formed, Cousin Willie (Billy Garrett) and Cousin Slim (Marvin Cheatham), so that more cards could be worked.

All four Hillbillies worked with one another at the convenience of the members and the whims of wrestling promoters. At some point in the mid-1960′s a manager, Cousin Alfred, began working with the teams. In the late 1960′s yet another Hillbilly, Vic (Vick Nichols), began working with Chuck and Rip. The last Hillbilly team with one of the original members was Rip and Vic. (Chuck Conley had left wrestling after an auto accident). Rip and Vic worked into the early 1970′s.

The Scufflin’ Hillbillies worked all over the country, but never stayed away from the Nick Gulas promotion for long.

They rarely held championships because they didn’t need them to get over. As the years progressed, the Hillbillies worked farther down the cards as special attractions.



Willie and Slim with Cousin Alfred

John and Jack Long

Jack and John Long

John Long was a Nick Gulas regular during the 1960′s. Jack Long was a young Harley Race. They held the Southern Tag Team Title in 1961, Race’s first title.

Herb Welch

Herb Welch was one of the four original Welch Brothers. He held the Southern Jr. Heavyweight Championship several times. He also held tag titles with Roy Welch, Lester Welch, Al Costello, Jackie Fargo and Tex Riley, to name a few.

Haystack Calhoun

Usually billed at 600+ pounds, Haystack Calhoun was a wrestling “attraction.” He was one of the most well- known wrestlers of the 1950′s and 1960′s. He traveled widely, but would work for Nick Gulas for extended periods of time. In the mid-1960’s, he often teamed with Jackie Fargo, both incorporating a lot of comedy in the matches.

Gene and Lars Anderson

Gene and Lars Anderson, not really brothers, were the original “Minnesota Wrecking Crew.” They worked occasionally for Nick Gulas in the 1960′s. The Andersons were much more closely identified with the Carolinas, Virginia and Georgia. In the late 1960’s, another wrestler became Ole Anderson, working mostly with Gene. In the 1980’s, Ole formed a team with yet another worked Anderson, Arn. Arn and Ole were part of the Four Horsemen, a heel stable that became fixtures on Ted Turner’s WTBS.

Oni Wiki Wiki

Oni Wiki Wiki worked all over the country and was a semi-regular for Nick Gulas in the 1960′s to the early 1970′s, mostly mid-card. Young Atlas and Wiki were Mid America Tag champs in 1970. Earlier, in 1960, he held the World Tag Title with Mike Clancy.

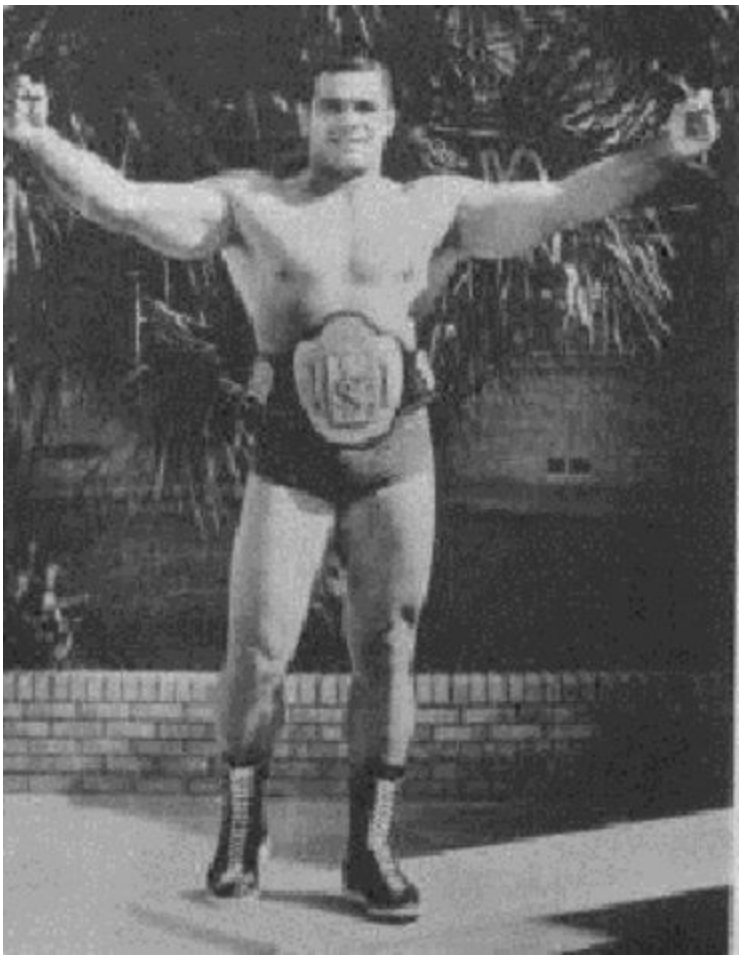
Young Atlas and Oni Wiki Wiki

As a wrestler, Oni Wiki Wiki was ahead of his time. He wore brightly colored Hawaiian skirts and leis. He always wrestled barefoot and was one of the more acrobatic wrestlers of that era. His top rope ring walk always excited fans.

As a collegiate football star Oni Wiki Wiki was featured in the Guinness Book of World Records for his barefoot kicking ability.

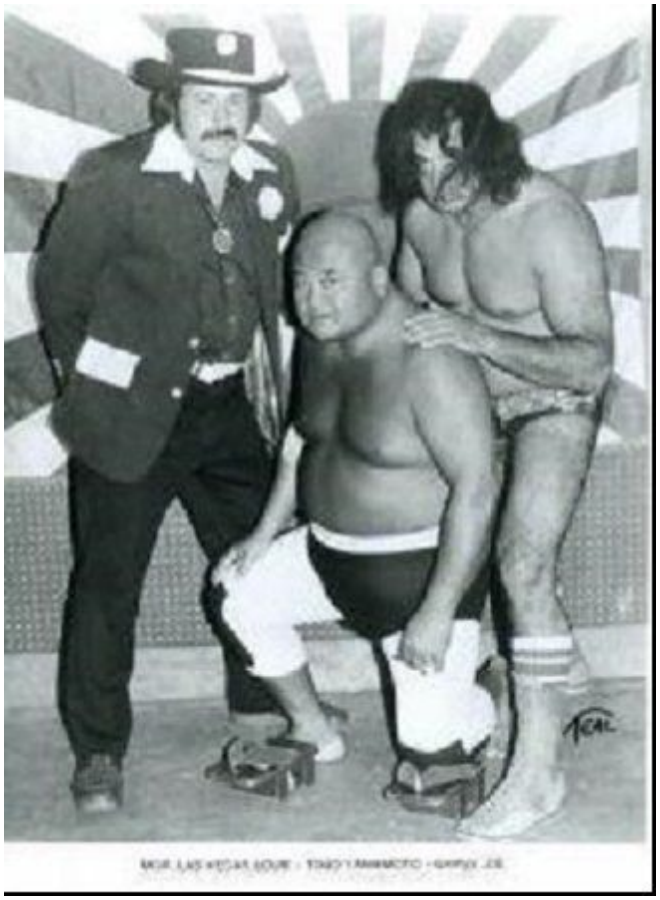
Young Atlas

Young Atlas worked regularly for Nick Gulas in the 1960′s. He also worked the Tennessee-Alabama region under the name Mighty Atlas. For a short time, Young Atlas teamed with a fictitious brother, Cyclone Atlas.



He was better known in other areas under the names Buddy Moreno and Omar Atlas.

Tojo Yamamoto and Gypsy Joe



Tojo Yamamoto and Gypsy Joe with manager Las Vegas Louis were known as the “No Pain Train” during the late 1970′s and into early 1980. Gypsy Joe was one of the Blue Infernos, the best masked team working the area in the mid-1960′s. Gypsy Joe, in his 70′s, was still wresting part-time up until a few years ago – in “hardcore” matches

The Interns (Jim Starr and Tom Andrews)

The Interns (Jim Starr and Tom Andrews) The Interns were spin-offs from one of the Medics teams that worked Florida in 1968. These Medics were Billy Garrett, who had been a Scufflin' Hillbilly at one time, and Jim Starr. When they began working for Gulas they dropped the Medics name and became the Interns because the name "Medics" had been overused in the territory. With Ken Ramey as their manager, they became the most hated team in the promotion. Billy Garrett was eventually replaced by Tom Andrews. During their heyday, the Interns and the Infernos (with J.C. Dykes) were probably the top two masked teams in the country.

The Interns (Jim Starr and Billy Garrett

Jim Starr, Ken Ramey, and Billy Garrett

Billy Garrett

Billy Garrett had some success as a Scufflin’ Hillbilly and huge success as an Intern. Before those gimmicks he was strictly prelim and after being replaced by Tom Andrews he gain saw little success. He soon left the business and became a truck driver.

Rowdy Red Roberts

Rowdy Red Roberts became a pro wrestler in the mid-1930′s. Roberts was a main-eventer for Gulas from the late 1940′s until the early 1960′s. A villain that the fans loved to hate, he held tag titles (with Mike Chacoma) and the Southern Jr. Heavyweight Championship. By the early 1960′s Roberts began moving down the card until he was working prelims. Even as a jobber, a Rowdy Red Roberts match was never dull.

Mario Milano

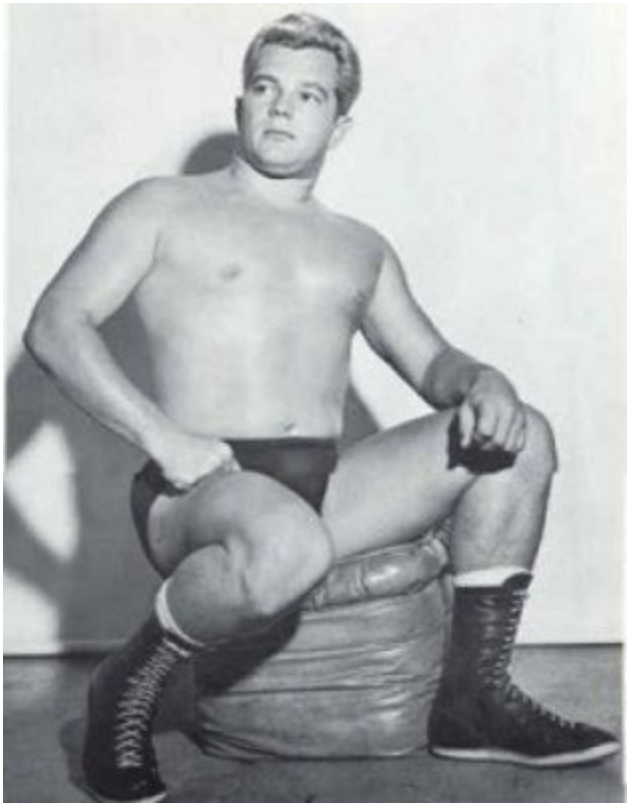
Mario Milano was very popular when he worked for Gulas during the mid-1960′s. His crowd- pleasing finishing holds were the head butt and bear hug. Mario held titles with both Jackie Fargo and Len Rossi. His matches with Tojo Yamamoto, both single and tag-team, packed arenas all over the territory for the majority of his run for Nick Gulas..

In 1967 he left for a tour of Australia and never left. He is one of the biggest names in the history of Australian professional wrestling.

Silento Rodriguez

Silento Rodriguez was a mostly mid-card worker for Gulas/Welch in the mid 1960′s. His gimmick wasn’t really a gimmick-- he was deaf and didn’t attempt to speak during interviews. He often teamed with Johnny Walker who naturally did all the talking..

Les Thatcher



Les Thatcher was one of the wrestling “cousins” along with Dennis Hall and Roger Kirby. During his years with Gulas he held titles with Hall and Bearcat Brown but he was mostly mid-card.

Today he operates a wrestling school.

Ken Lucas

Ken Lucas was a semi-regular for Nick Gulas in the 1960′s. He was at main event level in this territory, but was a bigger star in Gulf Coast Championship Wrestling. Ken Lucas began his career as a rowdy heel in the southwest. He teamed with Louis Tillet, Hans Steiner and Sputnik Monroe. He won the Amarillo TX version of the World Tag Title with Monroe.

Lucas first began working Tennessee as a heel (one newspaper account of the time called him “crowd riler”); however, it wasn’t long before Lucas tuned babyface, and he was just as good, if not better as babyface, than he had been a heel.

He was one of the few wrestlers other than Len Rossi who used a sleeper hold to win matches on Gulas cards.

While working for Nick Gulas he won tag titles with Dennis Hall and Johnny Walker.

Joe and Bill Sky

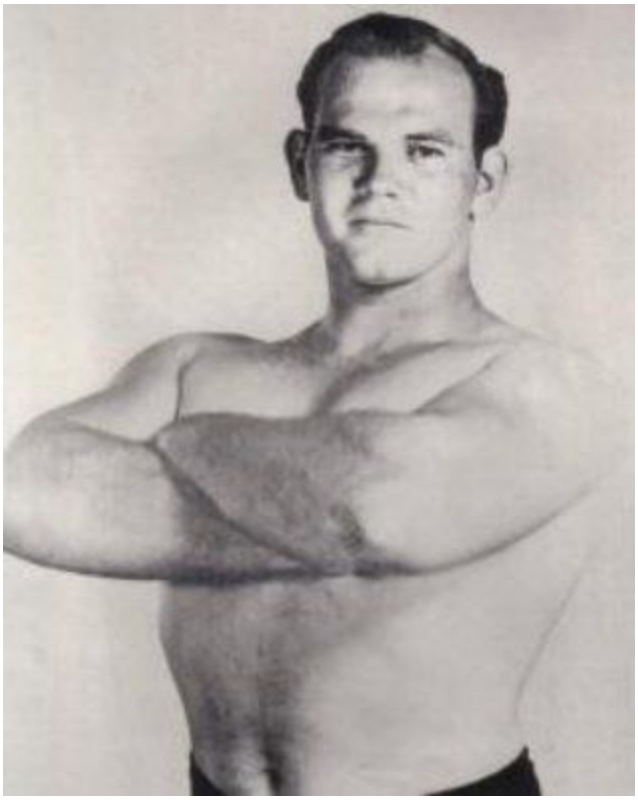
Joe and Bill Sky

Joe and Bill Sky (Bill Bowman & Joe Turner) were half-brothers in real life. They worked regularly for Gulas in the 60′s. They worked a half-baked cowboy gimmick and were usually booked low on the cards. They did occasionally work main events and held titles on a few occasions, always quick turnarounds. After Jarrett and took over as Memphis booker, Joe and Bill Sky moved up to top babyface team when Ken Lucas and Dennis Hall didn’t want to work for Jarrett.

They worked under their real names in some territories and as the Interns in Gulf Coast Wrestling, managed by Dr. Jerry Graham.

Johnny Walker

Johnny Walker worked the Tennessee territory regularly before donning a mask and becoming Mr. Wrestling II, one of the top masked wrestlers of all time. He was sometimes billed as Johnny “Rubberman” Walker when he worked for Nick Gulas, and though he was booked a good bit at the top of cards as a part of a tag team, as talented as he was, he was just under “top tier” as a singles wrestler. He won tag titles with Ken Lucas, Dennis Hall and Len Rossi but he reached his full potential on WTBS and Georgia Championship Wrestling as Mr. Wrestling II.



Jim White, Jerry Lawler and Jimmy Kent

Jimmy Kent was better known as the manager of the Bounty Hunters (Jerry and David Novak) in this territory. Jerry Lawler had only been wrestling a few years when this photo was taken. Lawler and Jim White worked their way up to main events and held the Tennessee version of the Southern Tag Title numerous times. Sam Bass took over as manager later.

Jim White, Jerry Lawler and Jimmy Kent

Irish Mike Clancy

Irish Mike Clancy was a top wrestler for Nick Gulas in the 1950′s and into the early 1960′s. He held the NWA World Junior Heavyweight Championship. While working for Nick Gulas he won the Southern Junior Heavyweigh (from Jackie Fargo) and held tag titles with Frankie Caine, Lester Welch and Oni Wiki Wiki.

Don Carson and Red Shadow

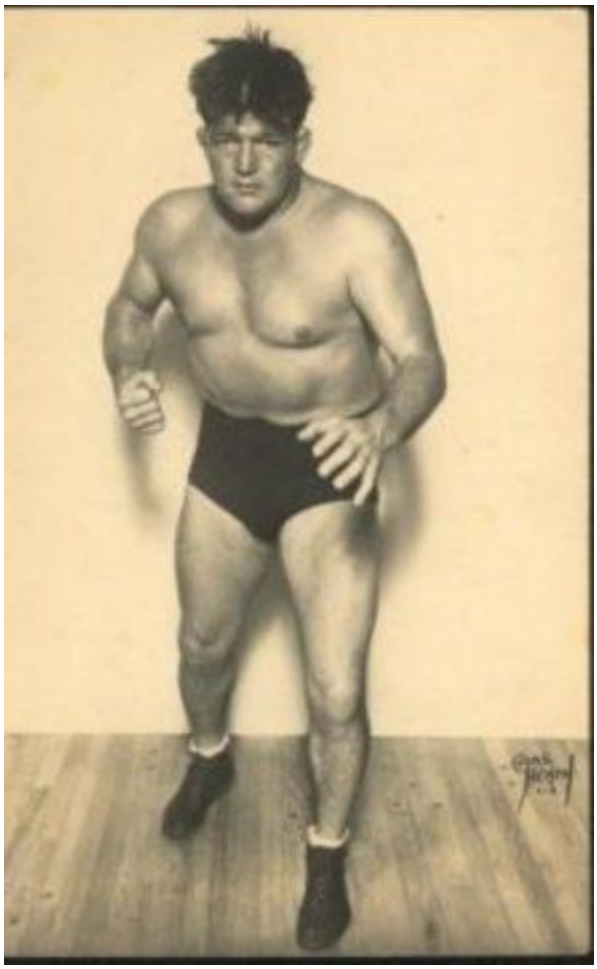
Don Carson was over for Gulas as both a heel and a babyface. In later years he worked as a manager. Dick Dunn was better known on the Gulf Coast under both his real name and Red Shadow. For a hurt while Carson and Red Shadow was the top heel team in Tennessee, winning the Southern Tag Title during that period.

They also worked the Gulf Coast as a team, winning the tag title there.

Don Carson and Red Shadow

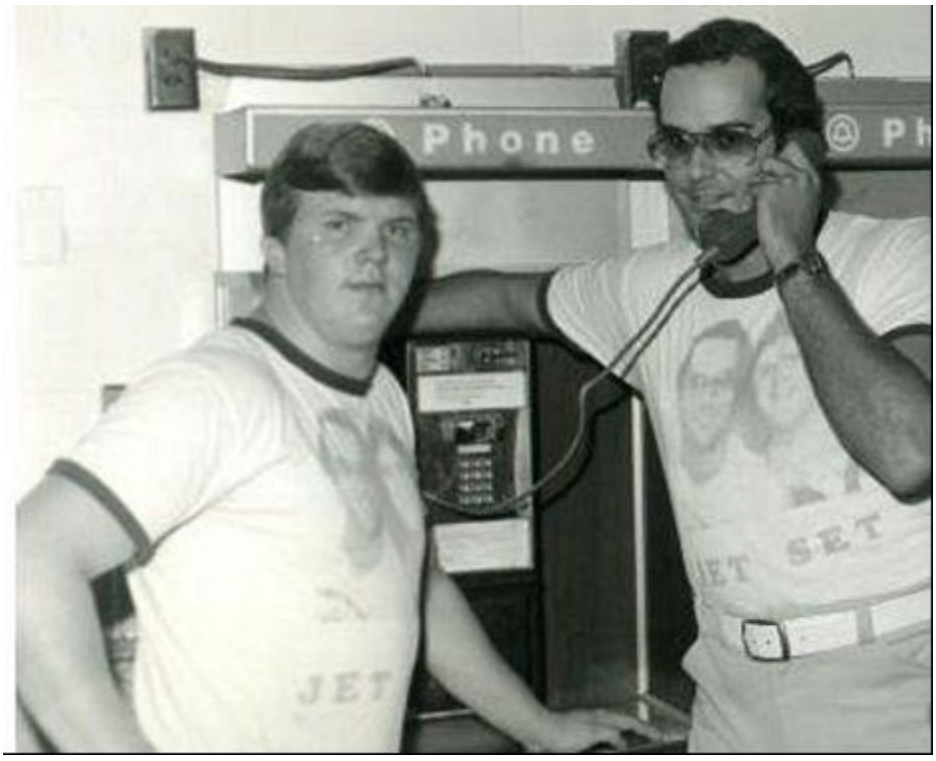
Danny Dusek

Danny Dusk (Sid Nabors) was a main eventer in his younger years. He also wrestled as the Masked Bat. Later in life he worked behind the scenes for Nick Gulas. In the 1960s and early 1970s when his best days were far behind him, he often substituted when someone on the card didn't show, even for main event grudge matches.



The Jet Set – Bobby Eaton and George Gulas

Bobby Eaton was just one of many talented performers that George Gulas teamed with to work main events and win titles. Eaton had only been working a couple of years when they worked as “the Jet Set.”



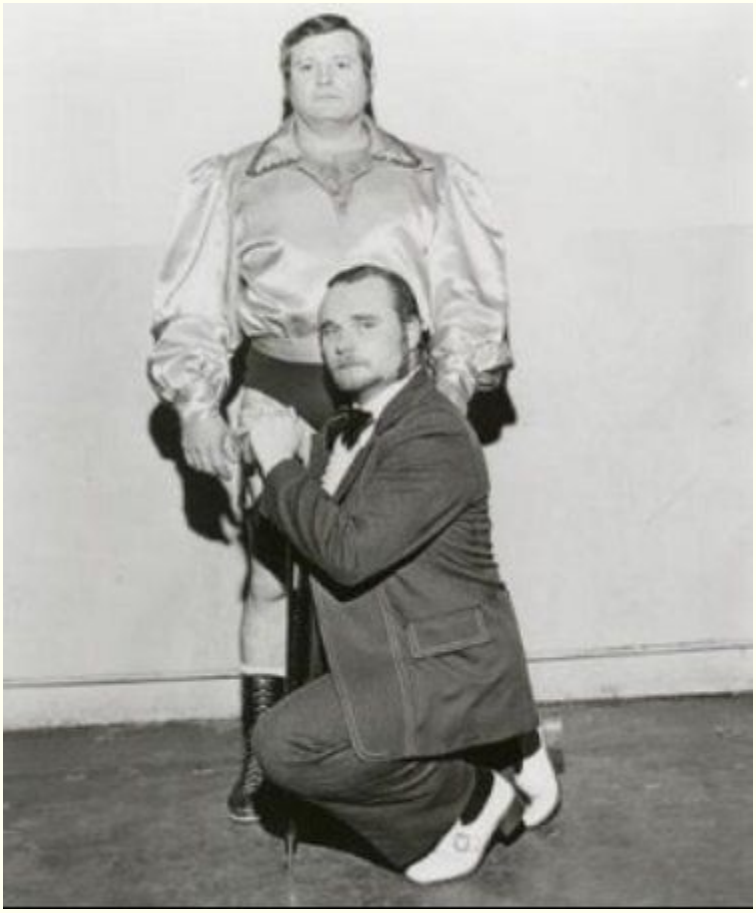
Bobby Eaton and George Gulas

Don Kent and Sir Clements

Don Kent was known as Bulldog Dog Kent in some territories. He had particularly good runs in Detroit and Arizona. At one point in his career he joined Al Costello and teamed as the Fabulous Kangaroos. Working for Nick Gulas they were his World Tag Champs on several occasions.

After Costello retired, Kent continued working for Nick Gulas as a top heel, winning the NWA Mid-America Heavyweight Championship four times.

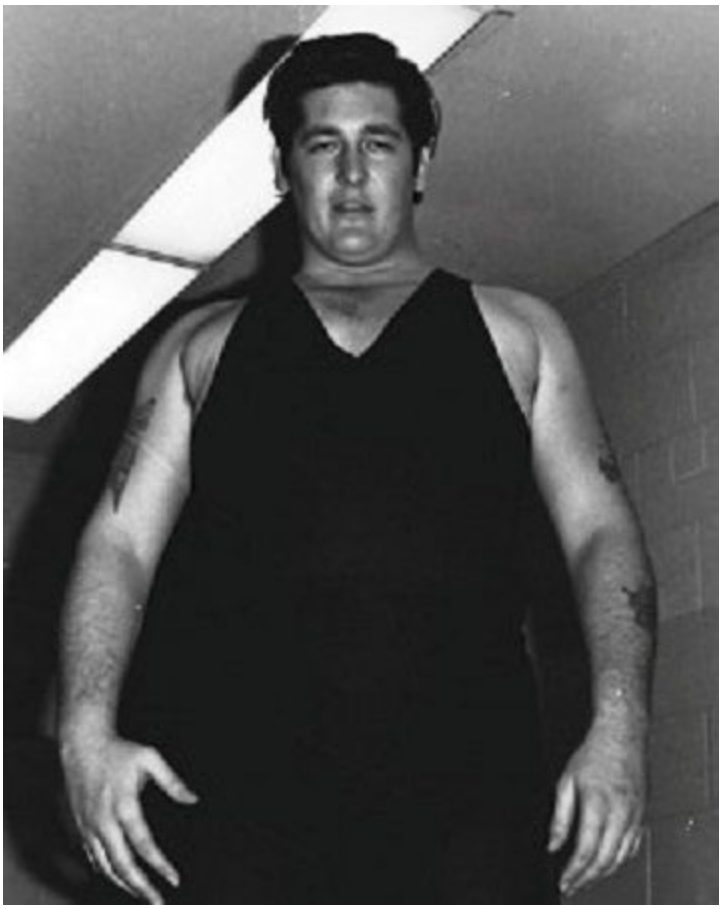
Before becoming a manager in the U.S., Sir Steve Clements was a top wrestler in Britain.



Big Bad John

Big Bad John was a top heel for Nick Gulas in the 1970′s. He teamed with Pepe Lopez, winning the Tennessee-Alabama version of the World Tag Championship.

He also worked as a babyface for a time, teaming with Bill Dundee and Jackie Fargo against top heel teams Jerry Lawler and Sam Bass and Phil Hickerson and Dennis Condrey. As a babyface he called himself the Bicentennial Baby-- that was in 1976, of course.



Tom Drake

Tom Drake was a Nick Gulas regular during the 1950′s and 1960′s. He worked at the top of many cards in the 1950′s, but dropped to mostly prelims by the mid-60′s. Tennessee wrestling was wild, and often bloody. Wrestling at the bottom of the cards, under the radar, was where a member of the Alabama House of Representatives should have been. He served in the Alabama House for nine terms, retiring in 1998. The name recognition was great for winning elections, but getting his head beat with Tojo’s wooden shoe, probably not.

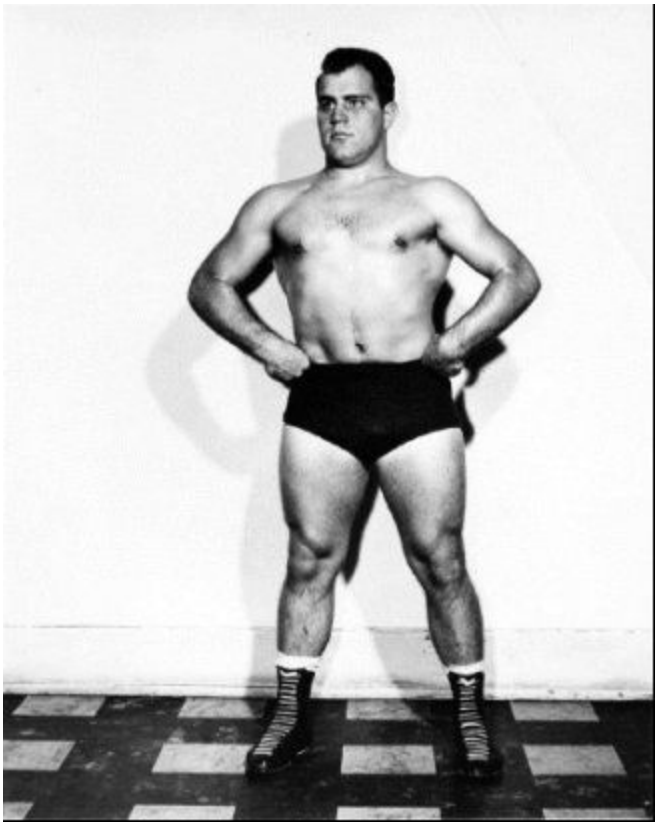
Bob Hamby

Bob Hamby was a talented prelim wrestler for Nick Gulas in the 1960s. He worked as a babyface and was fairly talented for a bottom of the card worker. I must have seen him wrestle heel Mack York at least a dozen times in the opening match.

Dick Beyer

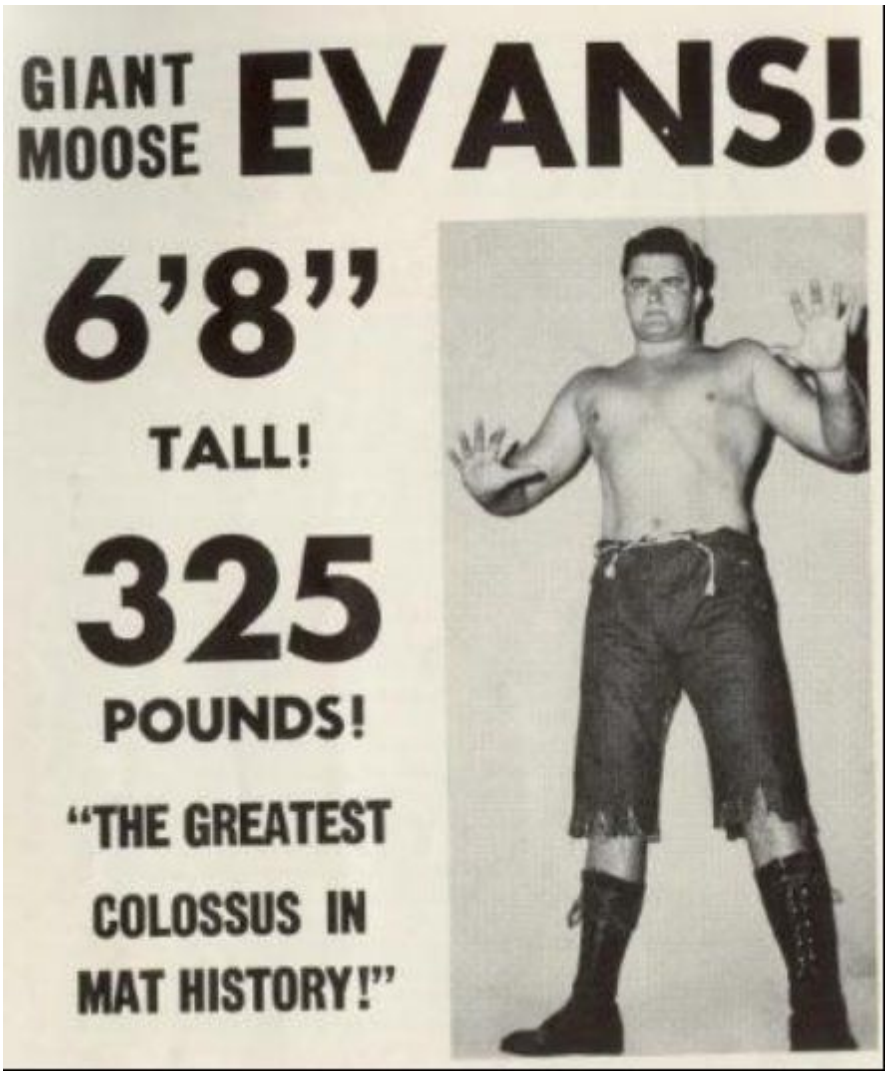
Dick Beyer, a fan favorite, was a very capable worker with legit wrestling skills. He worked for Nick Gulas off and on during the late 1950′s and into the first couple years of the 1960′s. He was often booked in main events against the top heels in the area at the time, Corsica Jean and Joe and Tor Yamato.

In 1962 he left the area for good. He donned a mask and became a heel, the Sensational Intelligent Destroyer. The Destroyer became the number one masked man gimmick in the history of pro wrestling. In the AWA, Beyer worked a Dr. X. The Destroyer was hugely over in Japan.



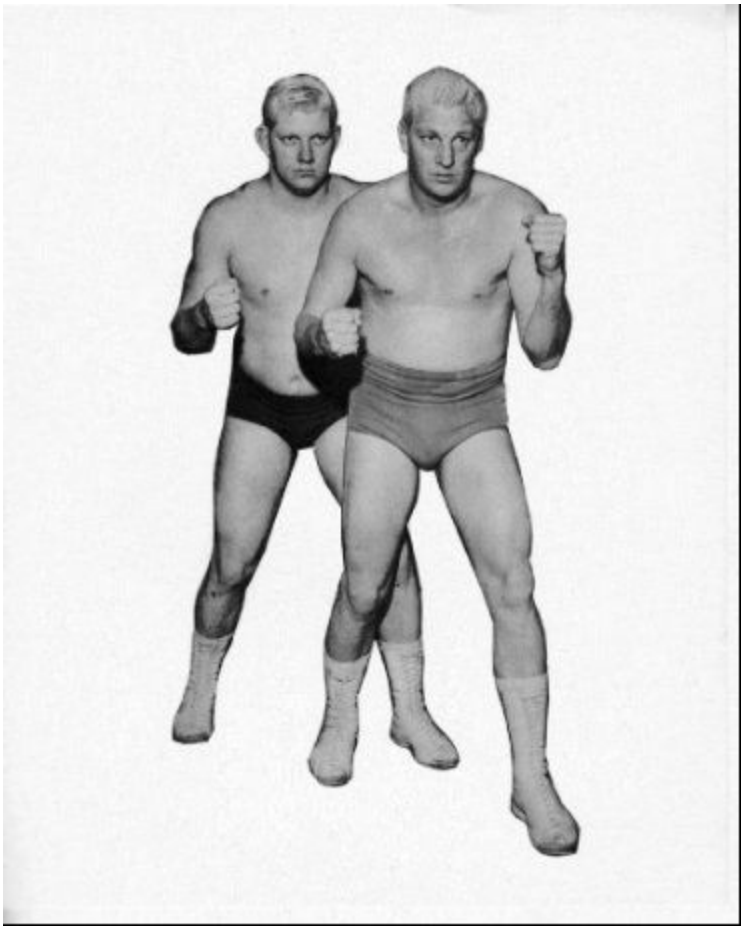
Moose Evans

Moose Evans worked in Tennessee and Alabama for a short time. He was most successful working with a worked brother, Giant Evans (Bob Merrill, Bob Stanlee). In 1966, they won the Tennessee version of the World Tag Championship, beating Karl Von Brauner & Luke Graham. In the AWA, Moose Evans held the tag championship on one occasion with Verne Gagne. In Canada, Moose and Giant Evans worked as the Mighty Yankees.



Ron and Don Carson

Don Carson was a regular on Nick Gulas wrestling cards from the mid-1960s and throughout the 1970's. He began working in this territory as one half of a worked brother team-- Ron and Don Carson. Ron was a very young Dick Murdoch.



Ron and Don Carson

Alex Perez

In his native Texas, Alex Perez was billed as “One Punch” Perez because of his skill as a boxer. He never used this gimmick when he worked for Nick Gulas, mostly because he was overshadowed by his best tag partner, Tojo Yamamoto. They were one of the better tag teams of the mid-1960s, holding the Southern Tag Title numerous times and very often feuding with the top babyfaces of that time-- Mario Milano, Len Rossi, and Jackie Fargo. Perez also had short tag title runs with Mario Galento and Eric Von Brauner.

Treach Phillips

Known in other territories as Treacherous Phillips, he had a successful run for Nick Gulas as one half of the tag team “The Body and the Brain.” Phillips was the Brain and Doug Lindsey (Doug Gilbert) was the Body. They defeated Len Rossi and Mario Milano for the Southern Tag Title in 1966. After Lindsey left the area, his “brother” Dynamite took his place as Phillips partner for a short run to extend the heat that the Body and the Brain had created.

Tuffy Truesdale

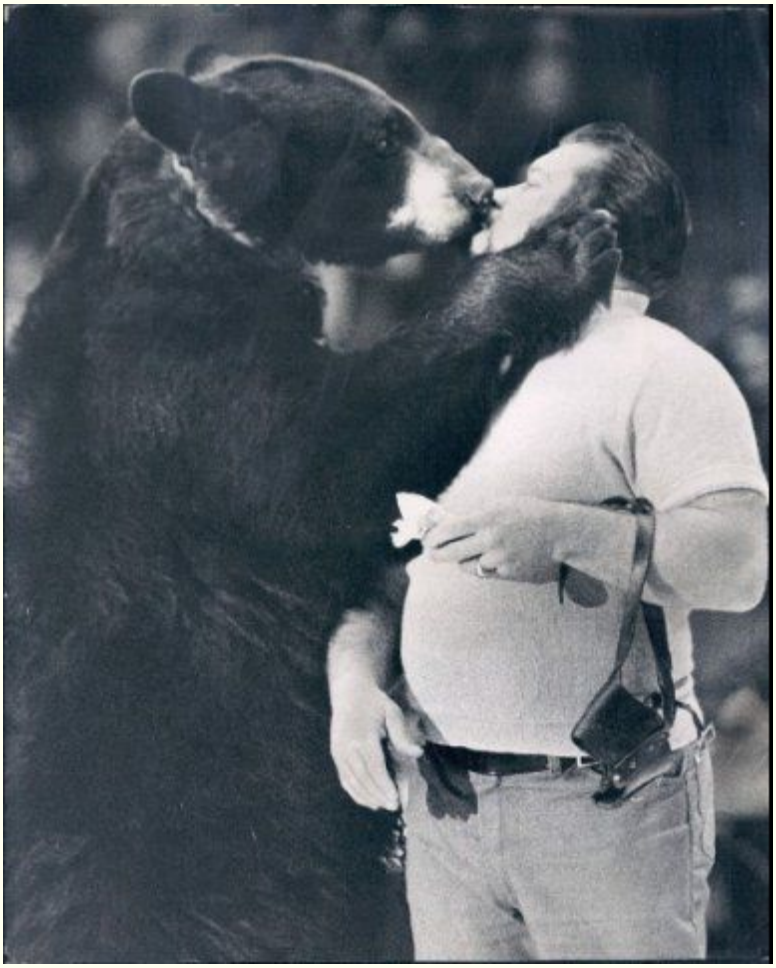
In the late 1940′s and early 1950′s, Tuffy Truesdale traveled from one wrestling card to the next wrestling alligators as a special attraction. Truesdale had held a version of the World Middleweight Championship from 1944 to 1946.

From Fred Blassie's book *Listen You Pencil Necked Geeks*: *We had a guy named Toughy Trusdale[sic] who'd wrestle an alligator. When the creature died, they didnt have a replacement, so Toughy went into the tank with the dead alligator to give the people their money's worth. He was rolling around, twisting the alligator's arms and head, and pretending that it was fighting back. It wasn't a spectacular performance by any means, there isn't too much you can do with a dead alligator. But toughy is the only one who really knew the difference.*

After the carnival was over, Toughy threw the alligator in the Merricmack River. The next day, there was a big story in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch: ALLIGATOR FOUND IN LOCAL RIVER. The reporter thought it had come from Florida or someplace, and managed to swim all the way to the midwest.

Tuffy eventually quit wrestling alligators and took up wrestling bears. He traveled the country with Victor, hitting towns from coast to coast. He even made one appearance with Victor on the Ed Sullivan Show. After traveling the Gulas circuit in 1966 with his alligator, he hit the same arenas in 1967 with his bear.

Tuffy would score a win over the alligator (How hard would it be to get pinned by a gator?), but he usually lost to the bear.



Thanks for Reading!

This is the first of several “Nick Gulas” eBooks that I have planned.

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